DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 450 202 UD 034 024

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TITLE Creating a New Vision of the Urban High School. Carnegie Challenge, 2001.
INSTITUTION Carnegie Corp. of New York, NY.
PUB DATE 2001-00-00
NOTE 14p.
AVAILABLE FROM Carnegie Corporation of New York, 437 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10022. Tel: 212-371-3200; Web site: http://www.carnegie.org.
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Improvement; Educational Quality; High Schools; Partnerships in Education; Public Education; School Community Relationship; School Restructuring; Small Schools; *Urban Schools

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on how urban high schools may be not only revitalized but also transformed into institutions that are designed to help students at the crossroads of their academic careers. It discusses the rationale for change, historic highlights of this effort, and a new vision for American high schools. Some of the promising approaches to change include: transforming large impersonal schools into small schools; using whole-school design; reaching out to parents and other community members to increase their involvement in education; and partnering with businesses and universities. The paper highlights the Carnegie Corporation's Schools for a New Society initiative, which has awarded planning grants to 10 community-school district partnerships working on urban high school reform. The paper also focuses on principles outlined by the New Century High Schools for New York City Consortium, a $30 million commitment to high school reform in New York City announced in December 2000 by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Open Society Institute, and the Carnegie Corporation. (SM)

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Creating a New Vision of the Urban High School

by Joyce Baldwin

Carnegie Corporation of New York was created by Andrew Carnegie in 1911 to promote "the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding." Under Carnegie's will, grants must benefit the people of the United States, although up to 7 4 percent of the funds may be used for the same purpose in countries that are or have been members of the British Commonwealth, with a current emphasis on sub-Saharan Africa. As a grantmaking foundation, the Corporation seeks to carry out Carnegie's vision of philanthropy, which he said should aim "to do real and permanent good in this world." Currently, the foundation focuses its work in four program areas: Education, International Peace and Security, International Development and Special Projects, which emphasizes "citizenship for the 21st century."

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Vartan Gregorian
President

January 2001

Dear Colleague:

Over the last decade, the Corporation's grantees and task forces have helped to articulate the view that, for the nation and individuals to prosper in the new global, knowledge-based economy, higher standards of achievement are needed for *all* students. The goal of achieving excellence for all represents an entirely different conception of schooling from the one that prevailed in the past and requires fundamental changes in all aspects of education and a strong commitment to both equity and diversity.

These concerns are particularly urgent for urban high schools. Almost every urban school district has made far greater progress in improving at the elementary and middle-school level than with high schools. Across the nation, too many students attend large, depersonalized schools that do not respond effectively to the diversity of skill levels of entering students. Nor do these schools provide students with the competencies they need to succeed, whether their goal is to enter postsecondary education or the knowledge-based workforce. Change at the high school level is a pressing challenge that requires vision, cooperation and innovation from teachers, principals and school administrators, but also from business leaders, parents, government officials and others who have an investment in our schools and our society.

This first Carnegie Corporation "Challenge" paper of the year 2001 focuses on how urban high schools can not only be revitalized but also transformed into institutions that are designed to help students at the crossroads of their academic careers to find the right paths to follow as individuals and as citizens. The paper also highlights the Corporation's *Schools for a New Society* initiative, which has awarded planning grants to ten community/school district partnerships working on urban high school reform. In addition, it focuses on the principles outlined by the *New Century High Schools for New York City Consortium*, a $30 million commitment to high school reform in New York City announced in December 2000 by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Open Society Institute and Carnegie Corporation.

At a recent Corporation-sponsored meeting on high schools, students were asked to give their views. Among the phrases they used most often were that they wanted "more communication," "humanity-based schools" and a way to "relate course work to later life." There is much wisdom in those requests, and we must listen to what we are being asked for; it is our children speaking and our shared future that is at stake.

Sincerely,

Vartan Gregorian

The traditional high school with its seven-period days punctuated by the ringing of bells and the changing of classes has achieved near iconic status as a cherished American institution. But our society has changed radically over the years, and especially in urban areas where the system has spawned large, impersonal schools, the design of high schools needs to be reexamined.

Fifty years ago students were confident that a high school education was their passport into the adult world, ensuring that they would graduate with the skills needed to gain a job in what was then an industrialized workplace. But at the beginning of the 21st century, profound changes in our economy, demographics, family life and community prompt us to reassess how we can best educate all students so that they can seek postsecondary education and participate in our knowledge-based workplace, community life, and democratic system of government.

As Vartan Gregorian has written, "The age of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth were the age of the mass production industrial worker, in which public schools were expected to provide no more than very basic skills and a sense of common citizenship for most children. A century later, ours has become the age of the knowledge worker, in which education has taken on greater importance for the personal development of individuals, for the civic, social and economic development of the nation, and for the search for solutions to the global challenges facing humankind."

RATIONALE FOR CHANGE. The challenge for public education today is daunting, especially at the high school level. In order to get ahead, all high school graduates must now have the oral and written communication skills and a mastery of mathematics that will enable them to pursue some form of postsecondary education. Success in the new global economy also requires students to gain the ability to solve problems, work as a member of a team, and use technology.[1] The increasing wage gap between those with and without postsecondary education places student achievement in high school at the crossroads of income inequality.[2] Today's students also need schools that give them experiences and knowledge that will build the civic competencies of tolerance, intergroup communications, conflict resolution, and engagement in public life that they need for democratic citizenship in a country with a diverse population.[3]

Despite these needs, many educators are saddled with an antiquated secondary school system conceived at the beginning of the last century. In most cities, too many students attend large, comprehensive high schools where they experience anonymity and lack of purpose.

There are excellent examples of urban schools effectively educating children, but in many instances schools are not meeting the needs of stu-

dents. "No city has effective schools for all its students, and in most cities too many youth are attending high schools where they are anonymous and not challenged to work to their potential," says Michele Cahill, senior program officer in the education division of Carnegie Corporation of New York. More than half of these students are taking less demanding general track courses where they fail to gain the knowledge and skills needed for college or the workplace. Many students are bored, disengaged from learning, and disconnected from adult influence and guidance. Tony Wagner of the Harvard Graduate School of Education has characterized the urban comprehensive high school as obsolete rather than failing and has described the problem as architectural, noting that our schools were not designed to help students with diverse backgrounds achieve.

Diversity, with all its many implications, is a relatively new concept in relation to American education. Focusing on high schools, for example, they have historically served as sorting devices, sending high-ability graduates off to college, most students off to pursue a vocation or service work and sending students who do not graduate to unskilled jobs. Most large, urban comprehensive high schools have never graduated more than half of their students or prepared more than a third of students for postsecondary education. Today, many students do not have the basic skills to pass required courses and advance to the next grade. Often, more than half the ninth-grade students in large urban high schools are not able to read their more demanding textbooks, but few if any of these high schools teach literacy. Too many of these large urban schools have adopted the "shopping mall" approach to educating a diverse group of students, allowing students to choose from a wide range of courses but with little guidance or understanding of the consequences of low expectations and low achievement for their futures. Students drift through their high school experience with few demands placed on them except for students in a high-pressure, high-achievement track. This situation is no longer adequate with young people facing a workplace that requires higher levels of literacy and many more people to think creatively.

In order for students to achieve success in today's world they must be engaged to do more challenging academic work. Yet our large, comprehensive high schools discourage student motivation and challenge. Most students are not known well in school by any adult since in the course of a day teachers may have over 150 students in their classes with little time to get to know individuals or to focus on their goals, strengths, weaknesses and interests. At the same time, the need for personalization in schools is growing as adolescents spend less and less time either with their parents or other adult role models and more and more time alone, with peers, watching television, or surfing the Internet. Most students see little connection between their classes and their futures and gain little sense of competency and confidence about their abilities. For all these reasons, students need at least one school-based adult who knows them well,

who cares about them, and who models mature character traits, someone to help them become healthy, intellectually reflective, caring, ethical citizens capable of pursuing a lifetime of meaningful work.

HISTORIC HIGHLIGHTS. The present effort to reorganize high schools should be viewed in the context of the history of education in America. In 1821 the English Classical School of Boston, which was the first public high school in America, opened its doors to students. It was an historic occasion, marking the beginning of a long evolution in education that has brought us to the present challenge.

In the 1870s, when there were only about 500 high schools in the United States, Calvin M. Woodward warned that the schools were not adequately preparing students for the world of work, and in response to his efforts, vocational training took root. Toward the close of the 19th century, the National Council of Education outlined an academic curriculum that, they urged, should be taught to all students, whether they intended to enter the world of work or to continue studies at college. In yet another educational crusade, in the early years of the 20th century, John Dewey exhorted schools to educate the whole child, emphasizing the need to prepare youngsters for democratic participation—what he termed "sharing in a common life" —as well as economic success. His concepts about learning, which hinged on his passionate belief that education must engage with and enlarge an individual's experience, continue to resonate with today's educators involved with school redesign.

By the 1930s, high schools no longer required entrance examinations but only an elementary school education. Although most teenagers were then claiming high school diplomas, the sheepskins were recognition of academic accomplishments for some students but signified only completion of a vocational education for others.

In the 1950s, the Soviet Union's launch of Sputnik, the world's first satellite, prompted a nationwide reassessment of schools, and the 1959 Corporation-supported Conant Report on the state of American high schools stressed the need to strengthen the mathematics, science, and foreign language curricula. Later the Vietnam War and its accompanying student protests led to other changes such as the addition of electives to include subjects that students found more relevant to their lives.

In the last decades of the 20th century, the rate of change in our society accelerated rapidly. The Internet and pressures of our global technology, especially with the expanded access to information, have placed ever-increasing demands on a school system designed for another era.

A NEW VISION. America's high schools must be redesigned to become communities that provide a high level of academic rigor for all youngsters so that they will be prepared to pursue postsecondary

education. To preserve democracy we must educate all students so that they will be able to participate as voters and as members of groups or organizations that form the basis of our democracy. Schools must teach students to be self-motivated learners capable of problem solving, decision making, and life-long learning, able to cope with an information base that doubles every five years. With an increasingly diverse population there is also a greater need for schools to be places where students gain social and civic competencies as well as academic skills. In order to achieve these goals, schools have to become more personalized and offer a purpose to students by demonstrating a connection between the world of work and their lives.

This is a pivotal time in our history. The demands of our economy, an ever-widening achievement gap, and social changes have created a crisis in urban education. Although there is no single 21st century equivalent to Sputnik to galvanize us to recreate the urban high school, we need to recognize the impact of technological changes on our schools and society. The need is no less urgent, the challenge no less crucial than when the launch of the USSR satellite prompted us to overhaul our educational system during the last century.

Over the past decade the standards movement has challenged schools to have high expectations for all students and there have been successful pioneering efforts by school district-community partnerships that have shaped new, successful high schools. These efforts have included small-school reform, whole-school reform and other critical elements essential to an effective school. It is time to build on these efforts, to share this success with all urban schools, not just a few; with all students, not just a few. We must seize the moment.

PROMISING APPROACHES. Across the country there have been many creative efforts aimed at structuring, organizing, and funding schools that support the development of school cultures to engage students in challenging learning. This work has shown us some elements of high school redesign that are effective: small schools, academic rigor, personalization, teacher collaboration and performance-based assessment, parent and community involvement and links to the real world through project-based learning, community service and internships.

Small Schools. Efforts to intentionally transform large impersonal schools into small learning communities of two or three hundred or even fewer students have demonstrably improved student attendance and academic achievement. For example, when Chicago reorganized large schools into smaller ones, the students took more pride in their environment, schools became safer places, and attendance rates improved.[4] The teachers in these schools work together collaboratively, and teams of teachers work with small groups of students over several years so the teachers can keep close check on students and their academic progress, getting to know their hopes and dreams as well as their personal problems.

Whole-School Design. The Talent Development High School (TDHS) with Career Academies, which is an example of a comprehensive school reform model, was developed by the Johns Hopkins University Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk (CRESPAR). The TDHS includes a Ninth Grade Success Academy that features daily 90-minute, year-long instructional blocks for mathematics and English classes and a Freshman Seminar that teaches study and computer skills as well as helps students understand the continuity from high school to college and careers. Beginning in the sophomore year, students enter a Career Academy that is centered on a specific career choice; each Academy ensures academic rigor by requiring students to take college preparatory courses.

The U.S. Department of Education began the New American High Schools (NAHS) program in 1996 when it recognized ten schools across the country that had revamped their programs, by tailoring their design to local needs so as to improve educational levels for all students. To date, 42 schools have been honored by the NAHS program. In Burtonsville, Maryland, Paint Branch High School qualified for NAHS status with its Academy of Science and Media magnet school where students can have hands-on experience with biotechnology, medical, and health careers as well as engineering and environmental studies. Grapevine High School in Grapevine, Texas, a 2000 NAHS, does not have a "general track" but instead sets high academic standards for all students, supporting them with tutoring, summer workshops and a student advocate service.

Other schools have reorganized curricula in a way that eliminates the general track and builds in literacy and mathematics supports to ensure that students are able to manage academically rigorous courses. In the last two years of high school students at Sir Francis Drake High School (1999 NAHS) in San Anselmo, California, have the option of attending learning academies that focus on topics such as engineering, communications or leadership. Teachers keep a close eye on student achievement and meet with individual students frequently in order to help forestall academic problems. Sir Francis Drake students also participate in field projects with one student recently exploring the world of radio broadcasting and that of webcasts.

Other Critical Elements of Reform. Schools have reached out to parents and other community members to increase their involvement in education and to demonstrate to students that caring adults want to help them achieve at a high level. Philadelphia schools, for example, have built a corps of nearly 15,000 school volunteers. In cities across the country there are examples of public schools jointly sponsored by community-based organizations both nationally affiliated such as Boys & Girls Clubs of America, the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps, the National Urban League and National Council of La Raza and local organizations. These schools offer access to a wide range

of community resources and support services. For example, at the El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice, a small public school in Brooklyn, students integrate study of biology and chemistry with projects focused on local environmental health problems such as industrial pollution and asthma.[5] Other schools have reorganized curricula in a way that eliminates the general track and builds in literacy and mathematics supports to ensure that students are able to manage academically rigorous courses.

Businesses and universities have partnered with schools to support efforts such as that at the Best Practice High School in Chicago where all of the school's 150 students can apply to participate in one-day-a-week field internships at a museum, library, or other local institution. Schools that are part of the national grant program of the Annenberg Rural Challenge also have community work projects as a strong component of the school day. These students spend up to twenty percent of their school day involved in projects such as analyzing clam beds in conjunction with a study of the local watershed, researching the local flora and fauna, developing a history of their community, or practicing journalism skills by writing a local newspaper. One South Dakota class substantially improved retail sales in their hometown by developing data that showed shopping locally would bring millions of dollars to their community, and in Oregon students raised salmon to restock their rivers.

These strategies are encouraging, but finding ways to replicate them on a national level is a significant challenge that will require public engagement and civic capacity to raise expectations and support the hard-to-make changes required to reinvent high schools in cities.

THE *SCHOOLS FOR A NEW SOCIETY* INITIATIVE. Recognizing the need to reinvent the urban high school in a sustained and organized way, Carnegie Corporation has launched the *Schools for a New Society* initiative. A key component of this initiative is the partnership teams composed of school officials, teachers, parents, and students as well as community stakeholders who are crucial to the success of high school reform. These stakeholders include teacher unions, college personnel, elected officials, business leaders, and leaders of community-based and youth development organizations.

To support this initiative, in June 2000, Carnegie Corporation awarded fifteen-month planning grants of up to $250,000 to ten community/school district partnerships that had been invited to submit proposals. These ten cities will develop blueprints for change that build on their already substantial progress in school reform at the elementary- and middle-school levels; the five districts with successful proposals will be awarded a total of $40 million over five years in direct grants, which will require an equivalent match of public or private funds.

In September 2000, Carnegie Corporation of New York sponsored a two-day Learning Initiative in Washington, DC, for the school districts that had been granted initial funding. Issues about high school redesign that are presented in this paper were discussed at this conference. Students who spoke at the conference touched the hearts and minds of participants, reaffirming their own concepts about high school redesign. Here are some of the thoughts the students shared:

"I have to ask myself, are we actually being prepared? We want to know the value of the high school diploma, given that most jobs call for at least two years of college training."

"I think that the counselors and the teachers should really get to know the students more. There's a lack of counselors in our schools, and nobody really knows the students."

"One suggestion I made, which could or could not be a solution, would be to have discussion classes where other students can realize that other races aren't completely different from them. And that they're just as smart as the other students."

"I realize that when I have a strict teacher, I never have a boring teacher. I think teachers should be more than teachers. I think they should be a friend, because having a teacher who is a friend, you just can talk to them and tell them your problems. They can help you go through difficult things."

"I think being on a block schedule is really helpful, because you have a lot of time with the teachers. They really take the time out to teach you. You just don't sit there for an hour-and-a-half doing nothing, in my classes anyway."

"I think the one reason I like that schedule is because our school is humanities based. We always have a connection back to reality, back to life, back to the other disciplines in the school. That makes a big difference. If you don't have the 'something' tying it all together, it just seems like you're going to eight different teachers, learning eight different lessons."

"My AP English teacher makes sure you know what you're doing. She doesn't go onto another subject if you don't understand. She makes sure you have it down pat. I think that's real good. She talks for about 30 minutes of the class. Then we have a little writing session, or reading, and then we have a group conversation. I think a lot of schools should have that."

When asked to give one phrase that each student would like participants to take back to their districts, the students said: "more communication," "humanity-based schools," "relate course work to later life," "make learning fun," and "listen."

Carnegie Corporation is listening to everyone who is a stakeholder in the education of youngsters, including the youth voice, which is essential to achieving successful urban high school reform.

"We know the way to effect change is to have that change be based in reality, to be data-based," says Michele Cahill. "Quantitative data are becoming more available, but there are also incredibly important qualitative data—narratives that convey the experiences of young people in school. This youth voice has been missing in the past, yet a key part of changing the high schools is seeing young people as assets and seeing them as active learners. We recognize the need to hear the youth voice because we get new information from that about what needs to be changed and what might work that you can't get from any other source."

SUMMING UP. An expedient solution will not solve the core problem of high school obsolescence. The aim must be to transform, not merely tweak, the design of the high school. In the words of Vartan Gregorian, "The traditional structures and formal systems for providing young people an education are often outmoded by the measure of today's and certainly tomorrow's needs. Education's bureaucratized structure inherited from another age must be modernized to fit the new circumstances. Youth also need opportunities for dialogue focused on understanding the purpose of their schooling and correspondingly what kinds of personal commitment it takes from them, and from their teachers and parents, to meet their goals."

The challenge to create a new vision of the urban high school, one that meets the developmental and academic needs of all youngsters, is urgent and daunting. This highly compelling and vital issue is the clarion call of our new century. As a nation, we've set high goals for ourselves and our children—now we must find a way to reinvent the high schools we have entrusted with the task of educating our youngsters so that those goals can be achieved.

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1. *Teaching the New Basic Skills: Principles for Educating Children to Thrive in a Changing Economy*, by Richard J. Murnane and Frank Levy. 1996, The Free Press.

2. The earning power of high school graduates has been seriously eroded, with a 70% decline in wages over 40 years for workers whose education ended with the completion of high school. In the 1960s, 20% of all jobs required only a high school diploma, and even students who did not graduate could get jobs in the unskilled labor market. Today there are many fewer unskilled jobs available, and students who do not go to college are often sentenced to a lifetime of low wages with an average hourly wage of only $11 compared with a $20/hour average wage for a college graduate.

3. In California, no one race or ethnic group of students comprises a majority, and other states expect the same situation will soon prevail in their schools.

4. *Small Schools and the Issue of Scale*, by Patricia A. Wasley and Michelle Fine. 2000, Bank Street College of Education.

5. *CBO Schools: An Education Resource Whose Time Has Come:* Issue Brief 1, Fall 2000. Washington, DC: Center for Youth Development and Policy Research at the Academy of Educational Development.

- NOTES -